The argument structure, multi-functionality and grammaticalisation pathways of the GET verb [tie53] in the Shaowu dialect

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Much investigation on the argument structure and realisation of GET, GIVE and TAKE verbs has been carried out over the past decades (c.f. Newman 1996, Gronemeyer 1999, Diedrichsen 2012, Lenz & Rawoens 2012, Nolan 2012, Tragel & Habicht 2012, inter alia). These analyses give a special focus to these verbs in Indo-European languages. My paper offers a different set of typological data, hence perspectives, from a Sino-Tibetan language called Shaowu of the Sinitic branch, spoken in Fujian province in southern China, which I collected over the past four years in the field. In particular, I look at the polysemy of the GET verb [tie53] in Shaowu, and attempt to explain its multi-functionality in terms of its diachronic development and change in argument structure. I also examine how its different syntactic configurations coerce gradual semantic change (c.f. Zhang Min 2011, Chappell 2012). Finally, I propose a polygrammaticalisation pathway that is unique to Shaowu, and compare it to the GET verbs in Mandarin, Cantonese, English and French.

The morpheme [tie53] starts out as a concrete lexical verb meaning ‘to get’, ‘to obtain’ (as instanced in example 1). This mono-transitive lexical [tie53] has then developed into a di-transitive lexical [tie53], meaning ‘to give’ (as in example 2). This curious antonymic sense occurs within the di-transitive construction, the mechanism of which will be accounted for, and which may explain the interesting fact as to why Shaowu does not have a basic verb of ‘giving’.

(1) As a mono-transitive lexical verb ‘to get’ [S+Vget+O]

□他/她得到了蜀个奖。

3SG get reach PFV one CLF prize
S/He got/obtained a prize.

(2) As a di-transitive lexical verb ‘to give’ [S+V give+IO+DO]

□我/她给他/她十块票儿。

1SG give 3SG ten CLF bank note
‘I gave him/her ten RMB (monetary unit in China).’

In addition, it can also be used as a causative verb ‘to make’ (example 3), or a permissive causative ‘to let’ (example 4), or a modal auxiliary meaning ‘to allow’.

(3) As a ‘make’ causative verb [S+CAUSmake+O+VP]

大家使得新娘向客人敬酒。

Everyone CAUS bridegroom ALL guest toast wine
Everyone made the bridegroom toast to the guests.

(4) As a permissive ‘let’ causative verb [S+CAUSlet permissive+O+VP]

娘使得小囝子去外头玩。

mother CAUS small child DIM go outside play
The mother let the little child go to play outside.
The multi-functional [tie53] has progressed along various grammaticalisation pathways to be used as a benefactive marker (example 5), a dative marker (example 6) and a passive marker (example 7), as well as a verb complement marker. Most, if not all, of these pathways are found in some of the world’s languages, documented in Heine & Kuteva (2002).

(5) As a benefactive marker [S+BEN+O+VP]

\(\text{你} \quad \text{去} \quad \text{买菜。}\)

\(\text{xieŋ}^{35} \quad \text{tie}^{53} \quad \text{xaŋ}^{35} \quad \text{k}^{21} \quad \text{mie}^{55} \quad \text{t}^{22}\)

2SG BEN 1SG go buy food

'(You) go and buy food for me.'

(6) As a dative marker [S+V+DO+DAT+IO]

\(\text{我} \quad \text{拿} \quad \text{书} \quad \text{得} \quad \text{他/她}/\)

\(\text{xan}^{35} \quad \text{na}^{22} \quad \text{kei}^{21} \quad \text{pan}^{55} \quad \text{gy}^{22} \quad \text{tie}^{53} \quad \text{xu}^{35}\)

1SG take PFV one CLF book DAT him/her

'I gave a book to him/her.'

(7) As a passive marker [Patient+PASS+Agent+VP]

\(\text{我} \quad \text{得} \quad \text{他/她} \quad \text{骂} \quad \text{了。}\)

\(\text{xan}^{35} \quad \text{tie}^{53} \quad \text{xu}^{35} \quad \text{ma}^{213} \quad \text{o}^{0}\)

1SG PASS 3SG scold PFV

'I was scolded by him/her.'

It is the aim of this paper to explore these various roles of [tie53] by looking at its syntactic configurations and semantic functions, as well as how they interact with each other. A diachronic account will be given to explain the multi-faceted synchronic properties of [tie53], against a backdrop of typological features belonging to what Chappell (2012) classified as transitional area between the North and the South.

References

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